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## Viewing cable 06PARIS1236, 2/21 STAFFDEL TALWAR VISIT: IRAN, IRAQ,

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06PARIS1236</a>	<a href="#">2006-02-28 11:43</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Paris</a>

Appears in these articles:

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RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 001236

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SUBJECT: 2/21 STAFFDEL TALWAR VISIT: IRAN, IRAQ,  
SYRIA/LEBANON, NATO/DARFUR, HAMAS, REGIONAL REFORM,  
COUNTERTERRORISM

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Senate Foreign Relations Committee Professional Staff Members Puneet Talwar and Tomicah Tilleman met a series of senior French officials February 21, in discussions that addressed Iran, Iraq, Syria/Lebanon, NATO/Darfur, Hamas, regional reform, and counterterrorism. On Iran, Chirac's Middle East advisor assessed that international sanctions would pose real hardships for the Iranian regime, and suggested that sanctions should be gradual, consensus-driven, and target the regime. MFA policy planning staff confirmed that Iran sanctions options under GoF consideration included bans on travel, investment, and students. On Iraq, Chirac's Middle East advisor called for a "perspective" for a departure of foreign troops to help split terrorists from Sunni resistance. On Syria, Elysee officials emphasized French support for behavior change (vice regime change), and criticized former VP Khaddam. MFA officials suggested willingness to consider a NATO contribution in Darfur, while strongly emphasizing resource concerns and the need for the U.S. to offer a commitment. On Hamas, French officials reaffirmed the GoF's no-contact policy, while stressing the downsides of a cut-off in international assistance to Palestinians. MFA officials voiced familiar views on protecting EU equities in the BMENA efforts. A senior Ministry of Interior advisor revealed details of a new, values-based and pro-American foreign policy platform for presidential hopeful/Interior Minister Sarkozy, while praising U.S.-French cooperation on counterterrorism. End summary.

#### ELYSEE ON IRAN, IRAQ, SYRIA/LEBANON

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12. (C) On Iran, Elysee Middle East advisor Dominique Boche assessed that the Ahmadinejad regime was going through an initial phase of "militancy" built on unrealistic assumptions. In this initial phase, Iran would pose problems on several fronts, through its obstinacy on the nuclear issue; efforts to exercise influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories; and a broader attempt to gain sympathy in the Islamic world via statements denying the Holocaust or calling for Israel's destruction. The latter Iranian strategy, Boche observed, was intended to appeal to Muslims' widespread resentment of a perceived "double-standard" vis-a-vis Israel, and thereby put moderate Arab governments in great difficulty.

13. (C) Boche voiced optimism on middle term prospects for Iran, concluding that Iran would come to realize that it needed external support and would face international sanctions with difficulty. In the case of petroleum sanctions, Boche observed that Iran remained vulnerable due to its low refinery capacity, which forced it to import oil from India. On possible civilian sanctions, Boche noted that some 2 million Iranian travelers could be affected by such a ban. Once the Iranian population saw the isolation provoked by the regime's policies, Boche concluded, moderates would have a window to assert a voice. Asked for further detail of French thinking on sanctions, Boche observed that no decisions had been made and that the GoF had found economic sanctions, in past experience, to be "rarely effective." For sanctions to be successful they would have to proceed gradually, reflect consensus and P-5 unity, and target the Iranian regime, not the population at large. Boche added that diplomatic overtures to Tehran would continue in the weeks leading up to the next BOG meeting, as seen in meetings underway 2/21 in Moscow. He voiced confidence in Russian negotiating efforts, noting Russia would not accept a nuclear Iran on its southern border. Boche voiced skepticism on IAEA DG al Baradei's proposal for Iran to retain a small research capacity under international supervision, and concluded that the only objective guarantee that Iran's nuclear program remained peaceful would be suspension of enrichment.

14. (C) Asked by Talwar to assess U.S. policy towards Iran, Boche noted that the U.S. had done what the EU-3 had asked in supporting EU-3 proposals which were later dismissed out of hand by Tehran. On the U.S. offer to provide 75 million USD

for reformers in Iran, Boche opined that the GoF was not averse to efforts to encourage political openness in Iran, though it did not support the U.S. goal of regime change in Iran. The GoF preferred an Iran approach similar to that pursued by the West with respect the USSR -- accept the existence of the other side, while not refraining from actions which encourage political evolution, as seen in the

PARIS 00001236 002 OF 004

Helsinki process.

15. (C) In brief comments on Iraq, Boche called for maximum international efforts to avoid Iraq's territorial breakup and Iranian dominance of the country. Though positive trends had emerged in Iraq, with the mobilization of the population in elections, a number of negative trends remained, including increased sectarian divisions, foreign interference, and a high level of terrorist activity. In order for Iraq to achieve true national reconciliation, Boche called for revising the constitution, to give more power to the central government, as well as a "perspective for a departure" of Coalition forces, in order to show that Iraq was truly sovereign. Boche clarified that the GoF was not asking for an immediate departure of U.S. troops, which would be catastrophic. However, more definitive U.S. statements, making clear that the Coalition troop presence was not permanent, could help divide terrorists from Iraqi resistance. Asked about French assistance to Iraq, Boche described the GoF offer to train up to 1,500 Iraqi police outside Iraq as "still on the table" after 18 months, with the impasse due to lack of follow-up from the Iraqi side.

16. (C) On Syria/Lebanon, Boche assessed that though a great deal had been accomplished over the past year, the dynamic had slowed down more recently, with the pace of the UN investigation into the Hariri assassination not meeting political expectations. Boche observed that the international community had greater control in pushing for compliance with UNSCR 1559, though accelerated efforts to push for Hizballah disarmament would put the Lebanese government in difficulty. Meanwhile, Boche viewed Syria as still seeking to reassert dominance in Lebanon and using its overtures to Iran to push Egypt and Saudi Arabia towards seeking a return to the status quo ante. Boche asserted that while Syrian behavior must change, the GoF did not advocate Syrian regime change, which would provoke alarm among Arab moderates. Boche added that if the Syrian regime fell, it would come from the inside. Boche described the situation of former VP Khaddam in Paris as "unfortunate," admitting that the GoF had asked Khaddam to stop making public remarks from France after Khaddam called publicly for regime change in Damascus. Boche dismissed Khaddam as responsible, "more than anyone," for the Syrian regime's crimes of the past 30 years. He added that, while uniting the Syrian opposition was a good thing, Khaddam was not the one to unite them. Boche voiced greater confidence in unnamed former Syrian MPs (likely a reference to Riad Seif), but conceded that choices were limited. He concluded that the best option might be to keep Bashar al-Asad under international pressure, remaining in control in Syria but constrained from causing problems externally.

POLICY PLANNING STAFF ON IRAN, NATO/DARFUR

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17. (C) Talwar and Tillemann's discussion with Philippe Errera, Deputy Director-equivalent for the MFA's Policy Planning bureau, focused largely on Iran and to a lesser degree on NATO/Darfur. Errera said he personally believed that the EU-3's diplomatic initiative on Iran had not been a failure, given that the international community has now come to a basic consensus on Iran, and furthermore, intelligence agencies and the IAEA have increased information about Iran's nuclear program. He believed there was still potential for diplomatic efforts to bear fruit, although he acknowledged that the GOF had been brainstorming about

potential sanctions regimes, including targeted sanctions, travel bans, investment bans, and student bans. He speculated that Western economies could weather a cutoff of oil exports from Iran, with a potential per barrel rise in price of approximately \$30. In a separate comment on NATO/Darfur, Errera said there was a feeling among some in the EU that some of the people advocating a NATO mission in Darfur were more interested in building up NATO than in helping the Darfur situation.

MFA STRATEGIC AFFAIRS DAS ON NATO/DARFUR  
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18. (C) Staffdel Talwar's discussion with MFA DAS-equivalent for strategic affairs Nicolas Niemtchinow focused on NATO/Darfur in greater detail. Niemtchinow said that he understood that the U.S. wanted to foster the process as the AU mandate ends and the UN mandate begins and that NATO was an option. He said that the French thinking remained preliminary and that many questions, particularly ones related to resources, needed to be answered. He affirmed

PARIS 00001236 003 OF 004

that France would not be averse to NATO involvement if the U.S. would provide "military means." He added that the French would like to know what the U.S. is prepared to provide. Niemtchinow said that France did not envision Western forces on the ground, not even a small presence force; instead, he said, the GoF viewed NATO's role more in the training of officers and providing strategic lift. He said that the EU had about 15 people already on the ground in Sudan but that expanding to a force large enough to serve as a deterrent would be difficult, given the difficulties in force generation. Furthermore, he added, using the NRF would not sit well with several allies who are adamant that the NRF should be used as an emergency force and not as a reserve. Also, he said, the lack of a peace agreement to enforce would make it more difficult to argue for the presence of troops on the ground.

19. (C) Niemtchinow concluded that, ultimately, the question of a NATO role in Darfur was one of resources. France wanted to stop the slaughter of innocents in Sudan but European countries, including France, were stretched thin overseeing elections in the DRC and providing forces in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Cote d'Ivoire and elsewhere. For the GoF, the root of the issue was determining to what extent the U.S. would provide and/or participate if NATO was to get involved in Darfur. European governments did not have the resources to address all of the world's problems and had begun to speak in terms of an "acceptable level of disorder." He said, though, that there was room for NATO and the EU to work together to facilitate the transition of mandates; for example, if NATO provided training, the EU could provide planning officers. Niemtchinow insisted that the French argument was "not theological" but instead about resources. For NATO to take on the challenge of "intervening everywhere" would be difficult; for example, NATO involvement in Pakistan, while good from a moral and political view, taught Europeans that NATO should not be doing everything. Other organizations, he concluded, ones designed for developing civilian capabilities, would have been more cost effective and hence better suited for missions like the one in Pakistan.

MFA NEA PDAS ON HAMAS, REGIONAL REFORM  
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110. (C) Talwar and Tillemann's discussion with MFA PDAS-equivalent for Middle East/North Africa Gilles Bonnaud focused on Hamas and Middle East reform efforts. Bonnaud emphasized the GoF's no-contact policy with Hamas (though conceding some "technical contacts" with Hamas municipal officials had taken place in the past) and GoF insistence that Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel, and accept past accords with Israel. At the same time, he cautioned against the repercussions of a total aid cut-off to

Palestinians in the event that Hamas failed to meet the Quartet conditions. Bonnaud suggested that the international community should not signal the "door is closed" entirely to Hamas, and look for ways to continue aid to the Palestinians after the formation of the new PA government. Bonnaud observed that PA President Abbas had shown firmness in his opening speech to the PLC, and that the international community should seek to help him as well. On BMENA efforts, Bonnaud repeated familiar GoF concerns on use of EU funding for the Foundation for the Future, and emphasized a preference for the U.S. and Europe pursuing distinct, but complementary reform efforts.

INTERIOR MINISTRY ON SARKOZY FOREIGN POLICY, COUNTERTERRORISM  
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¶11. (C) In contrast to other GoF meetings, the staffdel's discussion with Boris Boillon, Deputy Diplomatic Advisor to Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, focused on internal politics, specifically Sarkozy's candidacy for the 2007 French presidential elections. Boillon briefed the staffdel on ongoing efforts to craft a comprehensive foreign policy strategy for Sarkozy, which the Sarkozy camp aims to publish in six months. While emphasizing that the formulation of this strategy remained in preliminary stages only, Boillon described three main guiding principles: 1) promotion of values, such as democracy and freedom, in a "total departure" from past French foreign policy; 2) defending French security, through responding to terrorism, proliferation, and other threats, including greater willingness to resort to use of force; and 3) promotion of French interests. Boillon noted that Sarkozy wanted to dramatically improve French relations with the U.S., in addition to focusing on Africa and the Mediterranean. Asked about traditional French

PARIS 00001236 004 OF 004

preference for multilateralism, Boillon quipped that Sarkozy did not want to pursue multilateralism for multilateralism's sake alone. In the past, he observed, the GoF had promoted multilateralism because it remained a "weapon of the weak." Boillon added that the policy strategy would, of course, focus on Europe, though Europe remained "a joke," internationally. Sarkozy would seek to strengthen Europe as a real power, and would seek key partners like Spain, the UK, and Italy. In Sarkozy's view, the EU had served mainly as a tool for dialogue and negotiation, but now was the time for action. Boillon summed up that Sarkozy viewed France as having fallen behind internationally, perhaps 20 years or so, and that dramatic, effective action was needed for France to catch up with the rest of the world.

¶12. (C) In closing, Boillon commended GoF-USG counterterrorism cooperation, particularly in the context of combating Islamic extremism. Boillon stressed the GoF's close ties with the Arab world and its large Muslim community, which he described as closely monitored by GoF authorities. He described a December 2005 anti-terrorism law which gave the GoF important new tools to combat terrorism, including increased surveillance powers, reinforced efforts to freeze terrorist assets and financing networks, and extended detention periods for suspected terrorists. Boillon described the GoF as in a never-ending fight against Islamic radicals, and noted that the GoF had expelled 21 extremist imams in 2005.

¶13. (U) This message was cleared by Staffdel Talwar.

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